

**PRESS RELEASE
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**September is National Suicide Prevention
Awareness Month**

Hagåtña, Guam; September 7, 2012 – According to the 2011 Guam Epidemiological Profile, suicide is the 5th leading cause of death on the island, with an average of one death occurring every two weeks. In recognition of *National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month*, the Prevention and Training branch of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse invites youth, families and community leaders to learn about suicide prevention and to take an active role in efforts to stop suicide on Guam.

Suicide deaths are highest among Chamorro and Chuukese youth and young adults, with about 60% occurring in those under the age of 30 years. DMHSA's Focus on Life initiative employs prevention strategies and programs that are data-driven and culturally relevant.

Youth Outreach and Empowerment

The students of Simon Sanchez High School hosted a campus-wide campaign, "*Sharks Suicide Awareness Week: Love Others, Love Yourself*" on Valentine's Day 2011, as part of their Service Learning project. Their goal was to remind all SSHS students that "there is a brighter side to everything, and that everyone is perfect with all their imperfections." This September 2012, the SSHS class led by Mrs. Tricia Unten is focusing their service learning initiatives on suicide prevention.

Prevention and Training branch supervisor Barbara S.N. Benavente commends the SSHS students and school personnel for their commitment to take action in suicide prevention. "It is inspiring to know that members of our community like these high school students are discussing ways in which they could learn and take an active part in suicide prevention work. The DMHSA Prevention and Training Branch staff need students, teachers, principals, bus drivers, school aids, cafeteria workers and all others in all school settings to learn how to recognize the signs and symptoms of a person who may be feeling depressed and having suicidal thoughts, and most importantly to be able to successfully intervene."

Building Local Capacity and Resources

DMHSA Prevention and Training Branch received its second three-year federal Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Youth Suicide Prevention grant for FY 2013 through 2015. The grant will be used to continue suicide prevention and early intervention services. To continue to build on Guam's trainer capacity and resources, DMHSA is partnered with the Pacific Behavioral Health Collaborative Council (PBHCC) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in a Master Trainer Development Program. The *Gathering of Native Americans* (GONA) training of trainers will be conducted this September and will aim:



- To engage the youth and adults service providers in the Pacific region in a community wellness effort with a focus on the prevention of suicide, bullying, and violence;
- To mobilize and empower the local community to bring about positive change (reduced suicide, violence, and bullying);
- To create a personal wellness plan that will enable each individual to determine the level of self-care needed to engage effectively in the community wellness effort; and
- To begin the creation of a community wellness plan to prevent suicide, bullying and violence.

Lead GONA trainers, Barbara Aragon and Josephine Keefe, represent the Native Aspirations Project based in Spokane, Washington. Native Aspirations is a national SAMHSA-endorsed technical assistance and training project that prevents youth violence, bullying, and suicide in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

DMHSA Program Coordinator, Gayle Osborn, is one of the three trained GONA trainers on Guam. Osborn shares, "Culturally driven programs are more effective in reaching local audiences. One of our challenges in the Pacific region is the limited resources available to us, compared to our stateside counterparts. By offering GONA here on Guam, our service providers have the opportunity to adapt the curriculum to fit our local culture." Participants from Guam and the neighboring Pacific islands will learn and use their personal strengths, experience and culture in respectful ways to address suicide and violence as a united community.

The GONA training will be held on September 10 - 14, 2012 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel from 8 AM to 5 PM. Representatives from the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Department of Youth Affairs, Just Say No Dance Crew, Southern Christian Academy, Sanctuary, Inc., Guam Community College, Republic of the Marshal Islands, and Republic of Belau are expected to attend. Training for trainers will follow thereafter on September 15 - 16, 2012.

For more information and updates on this month's activities, contact the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Prevention and Training Branch at 477-9079 ~ 83, visit www.peaceguam.org, or like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/FocusonLifeGuam.

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